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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001491

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL; NSC FOR
1E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2012

TAGS: PGOV PTER PINR PREL PARM CE NO

SUBJECT: PM ON COHABITATION: "NOT LOOKING GOOD"

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR E. ASHLEY WILLS. REASONS 1.5 B
, D.

11. (C) SUMMARY: PM WICKREMISINGHE TOLD ME LAST NIGHT (AUGUST 13) THAT COHABITATION TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH AND THAT PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT ARE "NOT LOOKING GOOD". HE PROFESSED TO BE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S MENTAL BALANCE. WHEN TOLD THAT SHE WILL BE COMING TO JEFFERSON HOUSE TONIGHT FOR DINNER, HE ASKED ME TO CALL HIM AFTERWARDS TO GIVE HIM MY OPINION OF HER FRAME OF MIND. I SAID I WOULD DO SO. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, SEVERAL VIP'S IN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT ONLY WE CAN BROKER A DEAL BETWEEN THE PM AND PRESIDENT, AN IDEA I HAVE RESOLUTELY DISMISSED. END SUMMARY.

COHABITATION

12. (C) AT MINISTER GL PEIRIS'S 56TH BIRTHDAY PARTY LAST NIGHT (AUGUST 13), I HAD A FIVE-MINUTE CONVERSATION WITH PM WICKREMISINGHE. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, HE SAID COHABITATION WAS NOT GOING WELL AND THAT THE PROSPECTS ARE "NOT LOOKING GOOD". HE STRESSED TWICE THAT HE IS READY TO TRY TO MAKE IT WORK BUT DOUBTS CBK FEELS RECIPROCALLY. HE CONFIRMED THAT FORMER FM KADIRGAMAR HAS BEEN TRYING TO BROKER A DEAL BETWEEN HIM AND THE PRESIDENT BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. KADIRGAMAR TOLD HIM FRIDAY THAT HE WOULD ARRANGE A FACE-TO-FACE MEETING BETWEEN THE TWO PRINCIPALS BUT HAD SO FAR FAILED TO DO SO. HE HAD CHECKED WITH KADIRGAMAR TWICE OVER THE WEEKEND AND AGAIN YESTERDAY AND LEARNED THAT HE (KADIRGAMAR) HAD NOT EVEN BEEN ABLE TO TALK TO HER YET. SHE HAS NOT RETURNED EVEN HER FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER'S CALLS.

13. (C) THE PM PROFESSED TO BE SERIOUSLY WORRIED ABOUT HER MENTAL BALANCE. AMONG OTHER REASONS FOR HIS WORRY IN THIS REGARD, HE ASSESSED THAT HER FLIRTING WITH THE MAOIST JVP, WIDELY REPORTED IN THE LOCAL MEDIA IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, NOT ONLY WENT AGAINST THE NATION'S INTEREST BUT HER OWN PARTY'S AS WELL. (WE AGREE). GL PEIRIS, WHO WAS STANDING WITH US, THEN MENTIONED THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE COMING TO DINNER TONIGHT AT JEFFERSON HOUSE. THE PM BRIGHTENED. HE ASKED WHOM ELSE I HAD INVITED (I TOLD HIM CBK HAD INFORMED ME THAT I SHOULD INVITE HER BROTHER, HER SISTER AND HER SON, A 20-YEAR OLD VET STUDENT IN THE UK; MY WIFE AND 20-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER, WHO WRONGLY SUSPECTS A MATCHMAKING ATTEMPT ON HER FATHER'S OR THE PRESIDENT'S PART, AND EMMA -- MY NON-GOLDEN, NON-RETRIEVER -- WILL JOIN ME ON THE US SIDE, AGAIN A PRESIDENTIAL STIPULATION). HE THEN ASKED WHETHER I WOULD CALL HIM AFTER THE DINNER OR TOMORROW WITH MY ASSESSMENT OF HER MOOD. I SAID I WOULD.

14. (C) AS THE CONVERSATION ENDED, THE PM AND PEIRIS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESIDENT GOES ALONG, THE GOVERNMENT NOW BELIEVES IT HAS ENOUGH VOTES TO PASS A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT LIMITING HER POWERS TO DISMISS PARLIAMENT. THIS HAS BEEN THE KEY ISSUE IN COHABITATION FOR THE UNF BECAUSE IT FEARS CBK WILL PROROGUE PARLIAMENT AT HER EARLIEST CONVENIENCE SOMETIME AFTER DECEMBER 6. THAT DATE CONSTITUTES THE ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE SITTING OF THIS PARLIAMENT; ACCORDING TO THE SRI LANKAN CONSTITUTION, THE PRESIDENT CAN DISMISS PARLIAMENT AFTER IT HAS SAT ONE YEAR REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE PM, HIS CABINET OR A MAJORITY OF MP'S WOULD AGREE. FOR THE SAKE OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S STABILITY AND LONGEVITY, RANIL WANTS EITHER TO GET HER WRITTEN, SIGNED COMMITMENT NOT TO EXERCISE THIS POWER FOR A CERTAIN PERIOD OR TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO ELIMINATE HER ABILITY IN THIS AREA EXCEPT IN VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. OR BOTH. THE MEDIA THIS MORNING ALSO REPORT THAT THE GOVERNMENT FEELS THAT IT HAS THE VOTES TO PASS THE AMENDMENT (A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY WOULD BE NEEDED TO PASS IT SO THERE WILL HAVE TO BE ROUGHLY 20 DEFECTIONS FROM CBK'S PA TO REACH THE MAGIC FIGURE OF 150 VOTES).

US ROLE? NO WAY

15. (C) OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS, WE HAVE HEARD FROM SEVERAL IMPORTANT FIGURES IN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS THAT A US ROLE WILL IN THE END BE NECESSARY TO BROKER A DEAL BETWEEN RANIL AND CHANDRIKA. SUCH IS THE EXASPERATION PEOPLE FEEL WITH COHABITATION TENSIONS WHEN THE NATION'S FUTURE IS AT STAKE,

SUCH IS A CERTAIN CULTURAL INCLINATION TO LOOK TO OTHERS TO SOLVE SRI LANKA'S PROBLEMS, AND SUCH IS THE CONFIDENCE IN THE US THAT THIS IDEA HAS ACQUIRED TOO MUCH CURRENCY. TWO UNF MINISTERS, AN EDITOR AND SEVERAL BUSINESS EXECUTIVES APPROACHED ME LAST NIGHT ALONG THESE LINES. I RESOLUTELY DISMISSED THE IDEA. MY LINE IS THAT THIS MAY CONSTITUTE A "DAMNED IF WE DO, DAMNED IF WE DON'T" SITUATION, AND IF SO WE PREFER TO BE DAMNED FOR NOT BUTTING IN TO THAT EXTENT. IT WOULD BE INTERVENTIONIST, I SAY, AND IT WOULD LEAD INEVITABLY TO OUR BROKERING EVERY TIME DISAGREEMENTS ERUPT. BESIDES, I POINT OUT, A DEAL, IF ONE IS TO BE DONE, MUST ARISE ORGANICALLY FROM THE PRINCIPALS IF IT IS TO LAST. I NEVERTHELESS REPORT THE FOREGOING BECAUSE IT SHOWS THE FRUSTRATION AND EVEN DESPERATION MANY PEOPLE FEEL.

COMMENT

16. (C) I WILL CALL KADIRGAMAR TODAY TO GET HIS VIEW. I MUST SAY I FACE TONIGHT'S DINNER WITH TREPIDATION. THE PRESIDENT COULD WELL BE IN A BAD MOOD. AND HER BRAT BROTHER ANURA HAS BEEN MAKING VERY IRRESPONSIBLE STATEMENTS LATELY, INCLUDING ONE IN WHICH HE ACCUSED PRESIDENT BUSH OF HAVING "STOLEN" 2000'S ELECTION. I PREDICT MY SELF-CONTROL WILL BE TESTED. SO WILL EMMA'S. SHE SNIFFS OUT INSINCERITY IN A JIFFY. (CAN DOGS BE NOMINATED FOR STATE DEPARTMENT AWARDS?)
Wills